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## Een sterke toren in het midden der stad

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# Summary

## *Problem statement*

This study focuses on Dutch church buildings dating from the period 1800 to 1970. The survival of these relatively young church buildings is, other than the survival of church buildings dating from previous centuries, not considered natural in our present, secular society. In the past decades, many church buildings from this period of time have been demolished, while other still existing buildings have an uncertain future: a thousand of approximately six thousand church buildings dating from the period 1800 to 1970 have been razed to the ground. These church buildings represent an essential and diverse heritage with art-historical, urban and religious-historical value. It is important to take well-considered decisions concerning the future of church buildings that no longer have their original function – a process not always examined carefully in the past. In this process we need to determine what we (still) have left, in the form of a qualitative and quantitative overview of Dutch church buildings. The next matter is *how* do we take these decisions. How do we examine which church buildings should be (integrally) preserved and which should not?

Part 1 and 2 of this study describe the church architecture from the era between 1800 and 1970. They explain the historical formation of the church scenery from a religious, stylistic, technical and urban perspective. An approach like this does not exist yet and shows how pluriform and unique these church buildings from this period are. Subsequently, part 3 of the study presents a validation strategy, specifically aimed at church buildings, with specific criteria of examination. Up until today, such specific validation strategies for church buildings have not been applied much in the Dutch heritage practice. However, considering the uniqueness of the heritage and the threatened position it finds itself in, it is desirable to do so. Additionally, within the scope of the study, a database has been developed, which outlines all church buildings from this ‘threatened’ period of time by architectural, religious and geographical parameters. The study offers theoretical and practical support to the decision process concerning the repurposing of church buildings dating from 1800 to 1970. It should contribute to a substantiated and respectful approach to the matter in question, related to the heritage of churches under threat.

Based on the above-mentioned, I derive the following twofold main question:

How did the architecture of churches develop in the period of 1800 to 1970 and what are the most important characteristics and qualitative features of this ecclesiastical scenery? How can Dutch church buildings be classified in a hierarchical sequence based on cultural-historical value?

## *Church architecture 1800 - 1850*

Between 1800 and 1970, large-scale activities in church architecture took place, in the context of the upcoming freedom of religion, growth of population, secularism and academic formation of architects. These developments led to an interesting and from international perspective uniquely pluriform building style, distributed over several denominations.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the church architecture would reflect the then disadvantaged social position of the religious communities, with as an exception the Dutch Reformed Church. Equal rights amongst the church communities would come about slowly, despite the equality principle sought after by King Louis Napoleon and King William I. Due to governmental subsidy starting from 1824, the Roman Catholics were capable of building

imposing churches. Yet, they were facing restrictions with respect to the design, the location and the size of their buildings.

In this era, most of the architecture was designed in the style of Neoclassicism. The hydraulic engineers of the government who, on behalf of the authorities, monitored the church architecture, sought after uniformity. They and the involved architects embraced the Neoclassicism that came up under Louis Napoleon's rule. However, this era has also given us examples of church buildings in the style of the early days of the Gothic Revival. For this reason, a uniform, typical style of the hydraulic engineers does not exist.

### *Church architecture 1850-1900*

The interference of the state in church architecture ended with the Constitutional Reform of Johan Thorbecke of 1848. From then, a more outspoken emancipation of religious societies and increasing academical knowledge of architects resulted in a stylistic division among church buildings of different denominations. All of this evolved against the backdrop of the national and the international architectural debate in this period of time. An ideological diversity between cultures, societies and countries led to a multitude of choices of self-conscious builds.

On national level, the pillarisation of the second half of the nineteenth century demonstrates a remarkable variation of styles in church architecture. The Catholics reverted to their characteristic idiom of architecture from the Middle Ages. That was usually Gothic, but also Roman, as a straightforward way of expression of their pillar. Pierre Cuypers and Alfred Tepe became the most important architects of the Catholic emancipation. Initially, the Protestants were less devoted to one particular architectural style; they mostly embraced eclecticism. During the last quarter of the century, the Dutch Reformed and the separated Reformed discovered the Renaissance as a fitting discourse for their new churches, responding to the Catholics, who were emancipating on a social and architectural level. However, the focus on the Renaissance did not take long; the Protestants considered a characteristic expression of style subordinate to the function of a modest place of worship. Around the turn of the century, they were inspired by the innovative esthetical theories of the architect Hendrik Berlage. The Roman Catholics kept embracing the neo-Gothic style for a long time.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the religious communities founded their new church buildings on random locations in urban sprawls, due to the lack of a centralised urban city plan including churches. The historical town centers often had new (non-Reformed) churches replacing the shelter churches from the past. Sometimes, a church community succeeded in finding a representative location for a church in an existing city of an urban sprawl. That would depend on the financial input, as well as on the relationship between the administrations of the church and the city. In reality, in the fast-growing and chaotic cities, the construction of churches didn't progress as the church administrations were hoping for.

### *Church architecture 1900-1940*

The urban situating of church building improved from 1900 onwards. The Dutch Housing Act of 1901 resulted in a regulated and esthetical urban planning, in which church buildings became to play a significant role in urban design. During the interbellum, the pillarisation instigated the approach between religious communities, the government and confessional housing associations, resulting in a better situating of church buildings. The more approach among these authorities took place, the more a church building was given the chance to stand out significantly in an urban development plan. In the provinces of North Brabant and Limburg,

where most of the local authorities were homogeneously Catholic, new parish churches arose on so-called church islands, in the centre of similarly built parish districts.

In this same period, the church architecture became tributary to the liturgical experiments that occurred in the three main religious communities around 1900. The most important challenge was the adjustment of the church design to the new liturgical and spatial insights and finding a fitting architectural style. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the architectural interpretation of a church building found its origin in the ideological differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics from the nineteenth century. Due to the liturgical renewals, these ideological differences in church architecture lost importance after 1920.

While the Protestants were embracing a modern style of church architecture from 1900, the Catholics were finding their inspiration in the ancient history. Architects such as Jan Stuyt and Joseph Cuypers turned to church architecture inspired by the Early Christian and Byzantine period. According to them, the transparent spatial form from these eras corresponded with the revised liturgical and esthetical desires. However, many other Catholic architects remained loyal to the Gothic Revival architecture. For this reason, a surprising multitude of historical styles emerged in Catholic architecture from the beginning of the twentieth century.

Around 1920, the stylistic diversity in Catholic church architecture came to an end, when the Holy See started to regulate church architecture. From then on, a unanimous concept of space had to be applied, based on the principles of the 'christocentric church' (a church with a wide nave accommodating all the seats). There had to be an architectonic emphasis on the choir as a Eucharistic centre of attention. The architecture had to be sober and basic, with preferably a historical look connected to the region. As a consequence, the Catholic church architecture during the interbellum was mostly traditionalistic, with the exception of a few dioceses.

Throughout the interbellum, the Dutch Reformed church architecture came under influence of reflection. During congresses of church architecture in 1928 and 1929, the Dutch Reformed theologists and architects debated about a desired contemporary style of church architecture, influenced by the liberal movement. The wish for a certain 'sacred' atmosphere in the Dutch Reformed church building, which was instigated by preachers Jan Hendrik Gerretsen and Hendrik Creutzberg, remained existent. Therefore, the Dutch Reformed Church, under guidance of the 'Liturgical Movement' founded in 1923, orientated themselves on the church architecture of the Middle Ages as a source of inspiration. A deepened choir and an outspoken axial form and ditto seating plan appeared to suit the liturgical demands of the Dutch Reformists well. However, not all the Dutch Reformed theologists and architects supported the ideas of this liturgical movement. The classical aisleless church and central building with dominant pulpit were also present. Evidently, there was a large variation of floor plans and style influences in the Dutch Reformed church architecture. Architects and theologists added their own signature to the architecture or were inspired by the work of the well-known architect Berlage, or by the Scandinavian architecture.

Traditionalism also made appearance in the Reformed pillar in the thirties, reacting on the influence of the Amsterdam School style in the Reformed church architecture. Many Reformed church councils considered this expressionist style, which flourished in the interbellum, to be too decorative. That led to the end of the abundant and exuberant Reformed architecture of architects such as Tjeerd Kuipers, Berend Boeyinga and Egbert Reitsma, who were inspired by Abraham Kuyper's esthetical views around 1900. A remarkable aspect of the new traditionalist church architecture was the fan-shaped seating plan, which, around 1900, was no longer on the foreground. The fan-shape was replaced by a rectangular floor map with axial seating plan.

The above-mentioned developments in the architecture of church buildings from the first half of the twentieth century resulted in a rich architectural diversity, despite the aspiration to liturgical unity and standardization.

### *Church architecture 1945-1970*

From a quantitative perspective, the Dutch church architecture reached a peak after 1945. As a consequence of the destructive war and the post-war population growth, approximately 1500 new churches were constructed within a couple of decades. In average, this was the highest number in Dutch history over such a time span. In the post-war church architecture, pillarisation played a determining role; governments, urban planners and architects aimed at an equal distribution of churches of different denominations among the newly (re)built districts.

In the fifties, the Roman Catholics and the Protestants debated about an appropriate, contemporary style of church architecture. In this debate, there were proponents and opponents of the contemporaneity. Especially the Catholics preserved the traditional styles, referring to the Middle Ages and the early days of Christianity. The debate about the Catholic architecture often took place in the *Katholiek Bouwblad*, a Catholic architectural magazine, in which the traditionalist architect Marinus Granpré Molière and his vision were prominent. In North Brabant, the brothers Hans and Nico van der Laan were influential with their Bossche School style. From approximately 1946 to 1970, many dozens of buildings arose in this traditionalist style, recognisable by the Early Christian features.

Throughout the fifties, the desire to renewal within the Roman Catholic Church started. In this period of early prosperity, the episcopate visualised sober and contemporary architecture, inspired by the pre-war concept of the people's church. As a result, the usage of steel and concrete increased. Architects applied experimental floor plans, aiming at an abstract variation of the basilica type. The historical reminiscences were no longer required by the bishop's committees for architecture, pastors and architects. Several years before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), dozens of remarkable, modern and almost futuristic parish churches were built, inspired by post-war architecture of churches in France and Germany. At that time, the Second Vatican Council was seen as progressive and led to a less hierarchically organised service. Most of these churches were located in Limburg, where the extensive use of concrete in the mining areas surrounding Geleen and Heerlen was considered normal.

Even more than the Catholics, the Protestants embraced modernism throughout the fifties. The church architecture of the Dutch Reformists and the Reformists experienced an impulse by the exhibition 'De Ark', in 1957. The exhibition led to discussion about the correct type of church architecture amongst theologians and architects. Significantly, both denominations were receptive to experiments, with a significant role for abstract, monumental art. This art was integrated in the architecture in an outspoken manner. Moreover, both the Dutch Reformists and the Reformists observed the contemporary church architecture abroad with great interest, especially the Roman Catholic chapel in Ronchamp, of architect Le Corbusier. Partly due to his influence, in both the denominations, interest for an alternative church space came into existence. A space in which there was an emphasis on the experience of the atmosphere, instead of merely listening to the sermon.

After the war, the Reformed churches did not represent a specifically defined architectural vision. Traditionally, the Reformed church building had to be modest and basic. The most important requirement was the ability to properly experience the sermon. The esthetical vision of Abraham Kuyper, allowing art in a church building to represent religious meaning, was no longer considered relevant. A traditionalist design – derived from the Delftse School movement – complemented the post-war conceptions of the Reformists best. Nevertheless, throughout the

fifties, contemporary elements started to originate in the Reformed architecture. An example are the bible scriptures, which are sculptured in the external brick wall of buildings of architect Reitsma. In the sixties, architects such as Wouter Ingwersen and Geert Drexhage did an attempt to break away from the typical conception of modest church design. According to them and pastors such as A. Buffinga and Jacobus Overduin, a Reformed church building was allowed to represent an expressive and sculptural form.

Around 1960, modernism started to penetrate church architecture of all denominations. The ideological debate about style, design and location of the church building that started in the nineteenth century, fell silent due to influence of Ecumenism. Interconfessional approach led to common views with regards to the presentation of the church in the sixties. The church building almost literally became 'some kind of house' or 'a place to seek for shelter'. As a result, the stylistic distinction between Roman Catholic and Protestant church buildings became less relevant.

As a consequence of the Second Vatican Council, the Latin liturgy with its ceremonial character had to make place for the moderate service in the local language. In the modern, parish church, the priest would locate himself amongst the worshippers more than 'above' them. For the architectural look, this contained radical consequences: the church lost status as being a typological phenomenon. The traditional basilica type was substituted by the rectangular-shaped, aisleless church. The location of the modern, parish church changed as well, as a result of the large-scale urban development. Instead of being an iconic element in an area district, the church building became a less noticeable factor in the dynamic, urban space and was often surrounded by greenery.

A second explanation for the less central location of a church building was the point of view of the government that a diverse religious population structure should be reflected in the dispersion of church buildings in post-war areas. This explains why church buildings were spread out decentralised between residential areas and green zones. Moreover, Protestant communities were seeking a visually inconspicuous church. The missionary character of the community in the area was in their eyes more relevant than the architecture of the building. Besides that, the church had to be available for activities other than just the ceremony on Sunday, giving the building a multi-functional character. Dutch Reformed and Reformed communities gave preference to the location of the church to be near store outlets and social service centres, to stay close to the people. With the planning of churches in post-war districts, the religious communities met the ideal of the public, which was the merge of churches and social service centres. This ideal, amongst others, was inspired by the urban development conceptions of the Rotterdam-based 'Bos-movement'.

### *Threat and protection of church buildings from the nineteenth and twentieth century*

In the sixties and seventies, several religious communities had church buildings from the nineteenth and early twentieth century demolished, within the context of increasing secularisation and shrinking financial resources. These buildings were considered to be redundant. Although the Monuments and Historic Buildings Act of 1961 came into force, the first classification of monuments did not include many buildings from after 1800. From around 1970, the resistance against the church demolition started to grow. For this reason, the then called Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg (a Dutch governmental organisation for monument care, which is now part of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, RCE), had taken inventory nineteenth-century church buildings in the early seventies, by art historian Henk Rosenberg. Subsequently, in 1974, one hundred nineteenth-century Roman Catholic churches were registered as national monuments. Throughout the nineties, over another thousand church

buildings from the period 1850-1940 were added to the register. The Monuments and Historical Buildings Act of 1961, which was replaced in 1988, also offered the municipalities and provinces the opportunity to register relatively young buildings on their territory as monuments. This way, to the present day, approximately 800 nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century church buildings became monuments, plus thirty buildings in the provinces of Drenthe and North Holland.

From the nineties onwards, the existence of an increasing number of post-war church buildings was under threat, due to increasing secularisation. Around the turn of the millennium, heritage organisations such as the ‘Bond Heemschut’ and the ‘Cuypersgenootschap Foundation’ advocated a protection policy on national and municipal level. Some thirty post-war churches of different denominations were recognised as monuments by the state in the period from 2009 to 2016, after extensive inventories.

This protection of post-war churches has shown that the mentality of heritage preservation has changed. The emphasis lies more on preserving the characteristic values than on the reconstruction and expansion of the collection, which was the starting point of the traditional heritage mentality. In other words: while the first series of protection in the seventies and nineties of the twentieth-century was quantitative, the second series in the period 2009-2016 was mostly selective. Therefore, it is inevitable that some significant post-war churches are not protected by the national register. This limitation is partly taken care of by the policy of the municipalities. However, a protected status does not guarantee preservation. The determining factor lies in the continuation of the church building in an appropriate way.

### *An international comparison*

To place the problem statement of threatened Dutch church buildings into an international, comparative perspective, I have studied the conduct of our Southern and Eastern neighbours, with regards to nineteenth and twentieth-century church buildings. There are many church buildings from the period 1800-1970 in the Belgian region of Flanders and in the German state North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and similarly, this heritage faces threats. In response to this matter, we see similarities and differences between both regions. An important similarity is the strategy of classification that the researchers have applied – a strategy that creates way for policy options. The main difference is that the Flemish researches, such as the research of art historian Thomas Coomans, only focus on church buildings which still function as a place of worship. Coomans valued all nineteenth-century Flemish church buildings, based on a hierarchical order of cultural-historical values. In NRW, the reused church buildings were the basis of several researches. The buildings were divided based on the categories of the new functions. Through the category ‘reflection’, people asked attention for Gesamtkunstwerke (comprehensive artworks). The difference in approach in the two regions can be explained by the fact that the repurposing of churches in Flanders, until the present day, doesn’t occur as much as in NRW.

### *A validation strategy for Dutch church buildings in the period 1800-1970*

With regards to the Netherlands, based on the increasing number of abandoned church buildings, it is also recommended to apply a strategy of validation differentiation. In part 3 of this study I present a new validation strategy for church buildings. The strategy aims to give a maximum of answers to the present and future issues concerning the validation of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century church buildings. This way, it can support the approach

towards these church buildings. It can be applied by people who deal with the ecclesiastical heritage from this period in a practical matter, for example local, provincial, and national governments, heritage institutions, religious communities and project developers. Besides the above-mentioned studies in the neighbouring regions, the validation strategy elaborates on the existing validation methodologies for monuments, developed by the RCE, academics and heritage institutions.

The strategy of validation in this study aims to organise the extensive amount of Dutch church buildings originating from the period 1800 to 1970 according to their cultural-historical value. Validation and selection are required to decide whether to preserve the building or not, or to determine which buildings apply for subsidy in the future. The strategy consists of a hierarchal order of four levels: very high (A), high (B), average (C) and limited (D). I prefer the division in four levels over a division in three levels, for two reasons. First of all, each church building is an individual case and deserves delicate judgement. Second of all, with four levels it is easier to distinguish the top from the sub-top and that is an important measurement in the present day. The validation strategy with a four-rang division also applies with cultural heritage.

The four criteria architecture, urban development, interior design and history determine the validation. Every criterium consists of sub criteria and is granted a rating. The total rating determines the appointment of a church in one of the four levels and the subsequent policy measures. The criteria interior design and history, specifically related to churches, have not been used before in existing validation methodologies. I will briefly explain the importance of these new criteria.

Due to the vulnerability of the (sacred) church space, it is of great importance to take the interior design into consideration during the rating. The interior design maintains a consciously created balance between design, use of space, atmosphere and interior. Although many iconic churches have been preserved for repurposing, their valuable interior architecture could not always be saved. Through an independent validation of the interior, it can be decided to preserve the church building, including the moveable and immovable property pieces.

Church history, the second new criterium of the validation strategy, points at the relationship between the church buildings and the religious history. It is a criterium that matters in a time where the traditional Christian religions in the Dutch society face marginalisation. These religions have dominated our mentality and behaviour for centuries and the buildings are symbols of our history. The buildings represent *lieux de mémoire*. By explicitly focusing on the criterium church history, we shed light on and value our general history.

The validation strategy discussed here is more flexible and inclusive than the classical recognition of the building as a monument. The score or category of the validated object can fluctuate over time. This does not suggest that the existing validation strategy doesn't function sufficiently. However, the present matter surrounding the church heritage is complex and demands a specifically applied strategy as an addition to the existing approach.

The research of this study developed a database which gives insight into the numbers and geographical spread of church buildings and their cultural-historical characteristics. The usage of an instrument can precede the validation strategy.

## Conclusion

Part 1 and 2 of this book demonstrate the exceptional stylistic diversity in the Dutch church architecture of the last two centuries. This diversity is important, because of cultural-historical reasons and the reflection of the typical Dutch pillarisation and freedom of religion from the nineteenth century onwards. Metaphorically, if we compare the ecclesiastical heritage from the



centuries before 1800 with a deep-rooted tree trunk, the buildings after 1800 represent the rich branches, which grow into all directions. The database is indispensable and unique, due to the architectonic diversity and the presence of thousands of church buildings of different denominations spread over a small territory. This uniqueness can and has to be preserved. In reality, it is unfortunately impossible to preserve all the buildings and their interiors. Yet, a considerate selection, based on both stylistic and religious diversity and geographical and urban development criteria, is feasible. If we succeed, the world's richest and most diverse religious landscape will continue to exist, even in the twenty-first century.